Interview with Frank E. Maestrone

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR FRANK E. MAESTRONE

Interviewed by: Hank Zivetz

Initial interview date: June 6, 1989

[Note: This interview was not edited by Ambassador Maestrone.]

Q: Mr. Ambassador, just to begin, how and why did you become involved with the Foreign Service? How did you get into the diplomatic career?

MAESTRONE: Well, that's a rather interesting and somewhat amusing story, in that I was a military government officer in W#rzburg, Germany right at the end of the war, and I stayed on for another year. This occurred just after the end of the war. There was an announcement that Foreign Service exams would be given again. They had been suspended during the war, and they would be given throughout the world in various places where the military people could take them. One of the testing spots was going to be Oberammergau, Germany. I had been trying to get some leave from my commanding officer, and he said, “No, we have too much to do.” Along came the circular saying you will get five days' temporary duty in Oberammergau if you want to take the Foreign Service exam.

So I said, “This is a splendid idea. I'll get five days temporary duty in Oberammergau and I'll take whatever this Foreign Service exam is.” So I proceeded ahead in driving down in

my Adler convertible with my chauffeur to stay in the post hotel in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which is nearby Oberammergau and took the Foreign Service exam and I passed.

Q: Then how long after that did you enter the Service?

MAESTRONE: It was sometime after that. I came in '48, actually. In fact, I think my appointment was dated February 12, Lincoln's birthday, 1948.

Q: Well, you've had a long and very varied career, and we can't cover all of your experiences. But insight into some might be of great value to future researchers. For example, in your first posting in Vienna in 1948-49, you were present when the occupation ended and the Austrian peace treaty was concluded. Could you reminisce a bit about U.S.-Soviet relations in Vienna and the general political atmosphere from an American Embassy perspective?

MAESTRONE: The relations between the United States and the Soviet Union in Vienna were cool but correct, in that we were already entering, more or less, the period of the Cold War, although people, perhaps, didn't really appreciate that this was occurring. We were, for example, at the legation. This was an American legation at the time. We had not exchanged ambassadors with Austria, because Austria had been a small country. It's only after the war that every small country had to have its relations elevated to the level of embassies.

We were, for example, not permitted to travel freely through the Soviet occupied zone of Austria. We had to obtain a gray card from the Soviet authorities, which had to be applied for and generally, at least a week ahead of time, if you wanted, say, to drive down to the American zone in Salzburg, for example. Sometimes it was given to you fairly readily, and other times, it was a delay that might cause you to cancel your plans. The members of the legation were recommended not to venture into the Soviet zone unless they were doing this, of course, on official business.

So relations were rather tense, but not overly so, at the time. One was suspicious of the Soviet intentions even at that time, in that particular area.

Q: It has been said that first the American occupation government, then later the American diplomats, dealt with former Nazis, Austrian Nazis, because they seemed to be able to pull the reins of government together a little easier than those who didn't have experiences. What was your view, at that point, in terms of the Austrians with whom you had to work?

MAESTRONE: Well, in the first place Austria was not an occupied country in the same sense as Germany. It was considered a liberated country, at least by the Western Allies. I assume the Soviets subscribed to that as well, although they carried out their occupation as they felt that they needed to, in the same way that they did in Germany.

The political situation there was pretty much dominated by socialists, so that there was very little role for any former Austrian Nazis. I don't recall that being a problem in Austria. Of course, we did not have the kind of control that we had in Germany and where we, for example, could legislate law number eight, which set standards for the employment of German Nazis, particularly in government positions, etc. You have to remember that under the circumstances in Austria, there was an Austrian government actually functioning. Germany was quite different. It was divided into separate zones. There was no central authority.

Q: Now, also in Hamburg you experienced the end of military government and the establishment of the high commission in Germany. How would you gauge American attitudes at the time toward a future for Germany, and also for relations with the Soviet Union?

MAESTRONE: Before I answer that, I would like to make just one comment about one of the previous questions that you asked. Namely, I was not in Vienna when the State Treaty

was signed and the so-called occupation of the Allied powers, including the Soviet Union, ended. I was in Salzburg on a later assignment as consul there.

Now to get to your question about Germany, the attitude of the Americans, on the whole, was one of a certain skepticism as to Soviet policies as they seemed to be developing. Our interest seemed, mainly, to put Germany back on its feet, not necessarily as a major industrial, and certainly not military, power, but to enable the Germans to rebuild their economy sufficiently to take care of themselves. We were pouring a good deal of money and supplies in there to help maintain the German economy and, particularly, to feed the Germans in the initial stages. So we wanted them to take over the responsibility of taking care of themselves.

Q: Was that the essence of the work being done at the consulate in Hamburg? With whom were you dealing on the German side out of the consulate and on what issues?

MAESTRONE: I had several assignments during my four and a half years in Hamburg. Initially, I was a visa officer under the displaced persons program. I actually helped set up a visa office in a refugee camp, former German barracks, outside of Hamburg. Subsequently, I became chief of the visa section in Hamburg in the office in town. Following that I was in the economic section, where I wrote some of the first reports after the war about beet sugar production in Germany, about the fishing industry in Germany.

Then, my last two years, I was a political officer and occupied the position of deputy land observer for Hamburg. That system that had been set up under military government was that there would be land commissioners in the various provinces in Germany. Obviously, American commissioners were in the American zone, British commissioners were in the British zone. Hamburg happened to be in the British zone, so that they had a British land commissioner. But the role for the other Allies, the United States and France, not the Soviet Union, was to have land observers. In other words, we were there to observe how

the—one, the land commissioner carried out his occupation functions, and two, to keep an eye on what the Germans were doing.

Q: In Hamburg did you have any contacts with the Soviet Union?

MAESTRONE: None whatever.

Q: None whatever. Moving along, as a sidebar to the recent Iran-Iraq war, I know that you were consul and principal officer in Khorramshahr in 1960-62, when the oil terminal was constructed on Kharg Island. Was there any indication at that time that this remote area would become the focus of a bloody war?

MAESTRONE: Well, when I was in Khorramshahr, we had two crises that occurred between Iran and Iraq. Both of them were over the question of how the boundary line that was set along the Shatt-al-Arab River. The Shatt-al-Arab is formed, as you know, by the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates and then flows past Basra in Iraq, and past Khorramshahr and Abadan in Iran into the Persian Gulf. These crises concerned the question of the boundary line as I have mentioned—namely, that in 1913 a boundary commission accepted the boundary between Iran and Iraq at that point at the low water mark of the Shatt-al-Arab on the Iranian side.

Q: Boundary commission made up of whom?

MAESTRONE: The boundary commission was made up of the Ottoman Turks, who were then in control of the other side of the Shatt-al-Arab, what is now Iraq. The Russians and the British, and I think the Iranian government was also represented there, but in those days the Russians and the British pretty much ran Iraq.

Q: Iran, you mean.

MAESTRONE: I'm sorry, Iran, and the British were particularly influential in southern Iran.

Q: Did this dispute result in violence?

MAESTRONE: What actually happened was the Iranians were shipping so much oil from Abadan and also from other ports to the major international oil companies. I think the seven sisters, so called, were almost all involved in the Iranian consortium. It was operating the Iranian oil production at that time. The Iranians felt that this would be a good time to establish their claim that the dividing line between Iran and Iraq should run along the median line or the middle of the Shatt-al-Arab River, which is the normal way boundary lines are set when bodies of water, or particularly rivers, divide two countries or states.

Therefore, the particular thing that bothered them was that every ship coming up into Abadan and Khorramshahr had to have an Iraqi pilot, since the waters were Iraqi territory. They felt that this was very demeaning for ships to come up to the great country of Iran with an Iraqi pilot leading them into Abadan and Khorramshahr, which were their major ports in those days. Therefore, they decided that they would no longer accept any ship which had an Iraqi pilot aboard. They thought that the Western countries would want their oil so badly that they would send their ships up anyway and the Iraqis wouldn't dare challenge the Western powers. Well, in fact, the Iraqis moved artillery down along the banks of the Shatt-al-Arab and said that any ship coming up without an Iraqi pilot would be shelled. So captains of oil tankers were not about to run their ships up the Shatt-al-Arab under that sort of a threat. So nobody came up the river.

The Iranians expected the Western powers to exert pressure on Iraq to force them to make this change. The Western powers had no intention of doing that, and eventually, after about a month, when all their tanks became filled, and they were starting to cut back on the refining of oil in Abadan because they had no place to put it, the Iranians finally desisted and gave up their...

Q: Who was the ruler of Iran at this time?

MAESTRONE: The Shah.

Q: The Shah, the Pahlavi, not the father.

MAESTRONE: No.

Q: What was the American official government attitude in this controversy between Iraq and Iran at that time?

MAESTRONE: Well, our attitude was one of being completely neutral in this. This was a local affair in which we were not interfering.

Q: Did the British exert any influence?

MAESTRONE: No, they took the very same position. All of them took the same position. As far as I was concerned, I talked to the people who were responsible for this down in Abadan and pointed out to them that their case was hopeless if they expected the Western powers to come to their assistance. But they refused to accept my advice, and finally, had to give in. This not only happened once, but it happened twice. The next year, at the urging of the new Abadan port director, who was, incidentally, a very cultured, well-educated man. He had been educated in Switzerland and Belgium, spoke fluent French, excellent English. At his urging, the Shah, I guess, authorized their undertaking the same effort again, which resulted in the same failure, and my good friend, the port director, ended up in jail in Tehran.

Q: Was this before the United States began to arm and support Iran as one of our bulwarks in that part of the world?

MAESTRONE: Yes, this was, in one sense, this was before we began making major arms shipments to Iran. Although we were supplying them with military equipment and we did maintain military advisory groups, MAG groups, there. We had a small one in

Khorramshahr, at the Navy base there. A couple of naval officers were there helping with training and handling some of the technical aspects of the equipment, the way they were being supplied. We had a MAG group up in Ahvaz, which was the capital of Khuzestan, the major province of my consular district, from which most of the oil came. They were helping train the Iranian Army. But the training was more basic at that point.

Later on, as the Iranian Army improved its general capabilities, the decision was made in the time of President Nixon and Henry Kissinger that the Shah would become our bulwark in the Middle East. They supplied him with all sorts of very sophisticated arms, and it was a different situation to that extent.

Q: One more observation on Iran before we move to another part of the world. Could you at that time assess the attitude of the Iranian people toward the Shah, and perhaps, to project what ultimately happened in Iran?

MAESTRONE: I was, perhaps, not in as good a position as others in Iran, those in Tehran and other consulates, because my consular district had a population which was about 75% Arab. The Iranians who were there were pretty much the managers, supervisors, etc., of the operations, particularly the oil operations that took place there, or business people, all of whom were very supportive of the Shah. But even the Arab population, the Arab-Iranians, if you can call them that, were all very loyal to the Shah. There were some who were unhappy when he dropped Soroya and got his new queen, Farah Diba. For quite some time there were stories of some of the bazaaris having pictures of the Shah and Soroya still hanging in the backs of their shops, whereas, they should have been hanging up a picture of Farah Diba, which was passed around, of course. But many of those shopkeepers tended to be Iranians and particularly Bakhtiaris, from which tribe Soroya originally came.

Q: Okay, let's move ahead a little bit to NATO. In 1968 you were deputy assistant secretary general in NATO and chairman of the NATO political committee. It was in this

period in the summer of 1968 when the Soviets and some of the Warsaw Pact Allies invaded Czechoslovakia. Can you tell us, as an insider, some of the reactions of NATO?

MAESTRONE: Yes, they were rather interesting. The initial reaction within NATO came from the Supreme Allied Commander General Lemnitzer, who from his headquarters in Kasto, asked the Secretary General to give him an assessment of what all this various movement meant in Eastern Europe. This was going on before the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. The NATO countries in our discussions in the political committee, which I was chairing at that time, and where I had the responsibility to prepare an assessment, which was then sent by the Secretary General to General Lemnitzer. The attitude of the members of NATO was very cooperative. Everybody provided all the intelligence, all the material that they had, all of their best analyses, etc., and put them into the hopper, so to speak, at the political committee.

In discussions at the level in the council about the various steps that we might take, particularly moving into various stages of alert for the NATO powers, there was not that much unanimity. Some countries were particularly very cautious, and very doubtful about taking any steps that might possibly give the wrong sign to the Soviets. The Canadians were especially notable for their very cautious approach to this. The Danes, too, were pretty much like that. There was a good deal of caution displayed, generally, in the council, but, on the whole, the major powers, Britain, France, and the United States, did, and also with support from Italy and some of the other Mediterranean countries. The General, the Supreme Allied Commander, was given authority to take the steps he thought were necessary in terms of raising the level of alert. Otherwise, no real military action, particularly movement of troops, etc., took place, or was authorized, shall I say. I'm not sure whether they took place or not, but they certainly weren't authorized by the NATO council.

Q: You suggest, then, that even before the Soviets moved on Czechoslovakia, there was intelligence at NATO that there was that possibility?

MAESTRONE: Oh, yes, in my final assessment, we did not rule out the—matter of fact, we specifically said we did not rule out the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviets.

Q: Now, once the invasion took place, was there an escalation of the readiness position of NATO? Was there a change in the posture of NATO?

MAESTRONE: Well, by that time, we had come to the conclusion, and we could tell from the actions that were taken by the Warsaw Pact, that this did not represent a threat to NATO as such. Our concern had been that there might be a spillover, and this was the spillover which would have involved some of the NATO countries bordering Czechoslovakia, particularly Germany. Therefore, there would have possibly been some incident that could have exaggerated the situation. In fact, there wasn't—we could tell from the way the Warsaw Pact troops were being moved, and the actions that were being taken, that this did not represent a threat to NATO, as such. Therefore, there was really no call for any further military action, other than the stage of alert that we had gone to. The NATO powers all began protesting the Warsaw Pact action and making statements condemning it. That was about the extent of it at that point.

Subsequently, when the NATO council met in November, a couple of months later, the Council of Foreign Ministries had a very interesting and detailed discussion of this situation. It came up with a communiqu#, which was very strong in its opposition to this so-called Brezhnev Doctrine. Particularly, it made the point in a very clear matter, without actually using the name of Yugoslavia, that any action that might be taken against Yugoslavia, which you remember had veered away from the Soviet bloc, would have very severe consequences, or grave consequences, as it was put. This was a very clear signal that the Soviets—the NATO powers would not condone that kind of an action.

Q: Yet, in your tenure in Brussels, there was an obvious shift in attitude toward the Soviet Union, in preparation for the Helsinki meeting, and I understand that you were involved in the political advisor study that led to the Helsinki Declaration. What was NATO's input to

Helsinki, and what were the attitudes of the NATO Americans, those Americans in NATO and others, about an accommodation with the Soviets?

MAESTRONE: The NATO input into what came out of the Helsinki conference, namely the Helsinki Declaration, was a major contribution. To answer your question, the input from NATO which resulted in the Helsinki Declaration was a major one. In fact, at a certain point, there were indications from a number of NATO countries, particularly the smaller countries, Denmark, Belgium, Canada, and others, that NATO should be more responsive to these calls which the Soviet Union was making for a European security conference. These calls had been going on for quite a number of years back into the '50s, but they seemed to elicit, at least, a greater interest among certain NATO members, who wanted to have NATO consider going to a European security conference.

I was particularly concerned by this development and spoke to the Secretary General Manlio Brosio and suggested that this might be a good time to conduct a study which would look at the advantages and disadvantages to NATO of participating in a European security conference. He agreed, and he put this proposition to the council, and it was approved by the NATO council. The political committee then undertook an extensive study, which lasted for a couple of years, at least, in which—I should say lasted longer than a couple of years—but in which I participated for a couple of years before I was transferred. So that a lot of the basic work for the Helsinki conference was done in the NATO political committee.

Q: Now this study—that's very interesting—this study involved itself in issues in areas beyond the military context. Did it go into human rights and other things that came out of the Helsinki?

MAESTRONE: Yes, it initially started with a discussion of confidence-building measures, which is a subject of a continuing conference that came up with the Stockholm Declaration, or—I forget what it was called—a few years back which is continuing now

in Vienna, and also discussed the various political impacts that this kind of a conference could result in. As I recall, it was the Italians who brought into the discussion the question of human rights and the freedom of information, etc., and that was added to our discussions.

So the three baskets which came out of the Geneva preparatory meetings for the Helsinki Conference originated in the NATO discussions and were included in the political committee's report.

Q: Was the American position at that time favorable to proceeding with this conference?

MAESTRONE: Interesting enough, in the initial discussions, the United States, Britain, West Germany were all opposed to going to any European Security Conference, and took a fairly hard line in this connection. Although they participated very actively in the studies and made—particularly the United States and Britain made excellent contributions to the study.

An interesting development that took place, subsequently, was that, in the days of President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State, there came the desire to make some foreign policy progress in our relationships with the Soviet Union, particularly, I think, in connection with the reelection of President Nixon for domestic political purposes. In any event, this was one of the driving forces and, suddenly, the U.S. position changed from being opposed to attending the European Security Conference to being very much in favor of it and pushing for the conclusion of the study and for a movement toward a kind of understanding or rapprochement with the Soviet Union which resulted in the Helsinki Declaration.

Q: The irony is that Nixon wasn't around to take the bows or the brickbats. Because if I remember correctly, the reaction in the United States for its participation or acceptance of this was not all positive.

MAESTRONE: I gather it wasn't. By that time, I was in Manila, in the Philippines, and did not receive as much information about the reactions in the United States and in the other countries about this declaration.

Q: Okay, now maybe we can move closer to your tour as ambassador to Kuwait, but, first, a word about Henry Kissinger and his peace shuttle, and the negotiations for the second Sinai disengagement during your tour as DCM in Cairo. How might you characterize the sentiments of your embassy colleagues toward the events of the war and the efforts to work out an accommodation?

MAESTRONE: I arrived in Cairo a number of months after the war. It was just about a year after the October '73 War I was there, late September 1974. The embassy was then a very small embassy. It was very active in resuming relationships with the Egyptian government, which had been suspended since 1967, and only resumed early—I think, it was in February or March of 1974 that the embassy was reestablished in Cairo. We had had an interests section operating there before. The members of the embassy were all very interested in this new political development.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about your involvement with the Kissinger mission?

MAESTRONE: Well, we had at least ten visits by Henry Kissinger while I was there in Cairo because of the shuttle activities. These came fairly frequently and completely occupied the attention of the embassy, I mean, for all practical purposes—yes, it was still a small embassy in those days, not the great monster that it is today. We had to devote all our attention to supporting the Kissinger circus that came in. As with all visits by Secretaries of State—and I have participated in these in my earlier days when I was in the executive secretariat under John Foster Dulles. All of the secretaries of states' visits are circuses. I mean, they come in and there's a great upset of everything the embassy is doing and all attention is focused on them. But they were all aimed at achieving a peaceful

development of the relationships between Egypt and Israel, and they were well worth the effort that's put into them.

Q: You know, it's been said, because of modern communications and transportation, that many major issues are taken out of the hands of the people at an embassy, and the ball is run by someone, like a Kissinger, out of Washington. Was there much input from you and your colleagues in Cairo during these initiatives?

MAESTRONE: There was considerable input, particularly from our ambassador, Hermann Eilts, who was very closely consulted by Henry Kissinger on many of the steps he took with respect to Egypt. In fact, Ambassador Eilts was called away on consultation by Henry Kissinger, not only to Washington, but often to other places where Kissinger happened to be, particularly if it was not too far from the area. I think once he went to Pakistan or something like that to consult on these matters, so that there was very close consultation between the head of the embassy and the Secretary of State on these issues. As a result of Hermann Eilts being absent a good deal of the time, I was charg# d'affaires during some interesting developments there as well.

Q: Could you elaborate on some of these?

MAESTRONE: None of them were what you would call major developments. I remember there was one issue in which the Egyptians were going to bring up a matter in the United Nations about this whole relationship between Egypt and Israel, which would have upset the Israelis and disturbed the course of these negotiations. I remember this occurred in the summertime. Hermann Eilts was away on consultation. The Foreign Minister Fahmy was up on the beach in Alexandria. He had a little beach kind of hut or cottage there, to which he used to repair during the summer. I remember I had to drive up there and negotiate with him while he was sitting in his bathing trunks on the beach there to convince him to drop this U.N. effort that they were planning to undertake.

Q: Successfully, I assume?

MAESTRONE: Yes.

Q: How was the swimming?

MAESTRONE: He did the swimming. I never had the chance to. I had to rush back and send a cable. [Laughter]

Q: As ambassador to Kuwait in 1976 through '79, what were the principal American foreign policy objectives in that country and in that part of the world as you saw it from Kuwait?

MAESTRONE: Our principal objectives, really, related to two aspects of our relationships with the Middle East and with Kuwait, the first being the whole peace process. We were seeking to obtain Kuwaiti support for the peace process, for Camp David, for all sorts of steps that were being taken to try to bring peace to the Middle East, and particularly, the Palestinian question. The Kuwaitis were, of course, very interested in the Palestinian question. In fact, one quarter of the population of Kuwait were Palestinians. They occupied the middle level of the bureaucracy in Kuwait. In fact, they were the ones who made it run. But the policy decisions were taken by the Kuwaitis, not by the Palestinians. That was quite clear.

The other aspect related to oil and finance. We were concerned about the various steps OPEC was taking, particularly, with respect to raising the price of oil. I know the Secretary of the Treasury, Mike Blumenthal, made a couple of trips over there in this connection, both of them unsuccessful.

The other matter that was of considerable concern was the question of the dollar, which, at that time, had lost a great deal in value. There was concern, on our part, that the oil-rich countries in the Middle East might shift their dollar assets to marks or yen. The yen was not particularly popular then—or Swiss francs or something like that, further pushing

down the value of the dollar, while we were trying to hold it at a reasonable level. The Kuwaitis were particularly cooperative in that respect, and held on to their dollars. As a result, when the dollar, after this crisis had passed, really went up, they profited from all of this. So it was a wise move on their part, and they were very supportive of us. They looked at it in terms of supporting the whole world economy, since the dollar is such an important element in it. I thought they took a very responsible attitude on the issue.

Q: You know, there are many players in the Middle East. How would you rank Kuwait in terms of influencing the policies of the Arab world? And how would you rank the United States in terms of outside influence on the Middle East, particularly in Kuwait?

MAESTRONE: The last part of that is a rather large question. In terms of the Kuwaiti influence, the Kuwaitis were influential in OPEC questions. They had pretty much of an intelligent oil policy, and they had some capable people running it. So they did have a good deal of influence there. Politically speaking, the Kuwaitis had relatively little influence. It is a very small country. They were anxious to keep the best relations with all of their larger neighbors, such neighbors being Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, etc. All of them were bigger than they. Therefore, they were not very prominent in making policy in that respect. They did take certain stands from time to time. But they tended not to be major policy makers in that respect.

When it came to oil and financial matters, there they were much more active and they did play a role. Their people were, generally, much more experienced, much more capable than the Saudis, for example, in this field.

Q: Now, in terms of the second part of the question, how much impact did the Americans have in terms of oil policies? In terms of Arab-Israeli conflict issues, in terms of the terrorist problem, how influential was the U.S.?

MAESTRONE: The United States' role in the peace process was very influential, starting all the way back with the Kissinger shuttle. It continued to play a role, although its influence

after Camp David became less and less, since most of the Arabs objected to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. Since we had been the engineers of this treaty, we were not that popular in the political terms.

However, in other aspects, we had a good deal of influence. For example, we had an extensive military sales program with the Kuwaitis, in which we supplied them with military equipment. It had been determined by a U.S. military survey conducted years earlier that it would be necessary for them to maintain a creditable defense; that is, at least, a short-term defense of their country if attacked.

Q: From whom did they expect the attack?

MAESTRONE: The attack could have been expected from Iraq, with which they did not have particularly good relations, and which had—and I think still maintains way on the back burner—a claim over Kuwait. Although it was not part of the Ottoman Empire, the Sheikh of Kuwait paid a tribute to the Turkish governor, General Basra, or the Wallie, I guess he was called—Wallie Basra. And the Iraqis presumed from that that the Basra authorities had some influence and authority over Kuwait and have maintained this claim, which I have not heard has been dropped.

Q: What was the year that you were director of the Sinai support mission?

MAESTRONE: I was director of the Sinai support mission from 1980 to 1982.

Q: Yes, could you tell us something about that?

MAESTRONE: The United States-Sinai support mission was the result of the negotiations which took place with respect to the second Sinai disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel, which were conducted both in Israel and Alexandria, Egypt, when I was DCM in Cairo. In fact, I was control officer for the Egyptian end of the negotiation.

The agreement had essentially been reached, but the Israelis wanted some kind of an assurance that their withdrawal—because this would require them to disengage from their previous alliance, vis # vis the Egyptians—that this would be that the buffer zone between the two would be monitored, and they insisted that the Americans do this. So it was agreed that the Americans would set up a technical monitoring system which used sensors and a variety of things that were subsequently developed to do this. They would be located in the Sinai desert between the Israelis and the Egyptians.

This was, I think, in addition to the agreement of protocol, or something like that. I'm a little dim in my memory on if this was actually part of the agreement or an annex to it. In any event, it was agreed that we would undertake this. And when we agreed to do that, then the Israelis were willing to agree to the disengagement arrangements. But the Israelis insisted that there could be no nationals employed, and they were thinking, of course, of the Egyptians working for the Americans who were there, because they were afraid that they might be intelligence people or something like that. So the Sinai field mission, so called, was set up, made up completely of Americans. There was not a single Egyptian, or Israeli, or any other nationality involved in this operation.

When I took it over in 1980, they had moved from their previous phase of the technical monitoring to an actual on-site inspection of Egyptian deployments in the Sinai. There had been a subsequent further disengagement, which came as a result of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The military requirements, with respect to the Sinai, set in the peace treaty had to be monitored, and this was done by the existing Sinai field mission, which sent people actually around to count tanks and personnel, etc. This included some Israeli installations as well that still were in the Sinai.

Q: Where were you physically?

MAESTRONE: Physically, I was located in the Department of State, where I had a suite of offices. It was a relatively small operation. I had about 16 technical experts, etc., working

in the Sinai support mission as such. We had the major work and the whole operation was done by a company with whom we had a contract, namely, E Systems of Dallas, Texas.

Q: It was a civilian operation?

MAESTRONE: Yes.

Q: Oh, that's interesting.

MAESTRONE: It was entirely civilian. That was another requirement that was insisted upon by the Egyptians, that this be entirely civilian, and no military people were to be involved in this, completely a civilian operation. Although it was not specifically stated, we were very careful never to select retired personnel who had been with CIA or any of the other intelligence agencies. We did hire retired military personnel because we needed their expertise in terms of identifying tanks, airplanes, etc. But these people were no longer associated directly with the military services.

Q: Is this still going on? I know that there is something there, but is this the same operation?

MAESTRONE: The American-Sinai operation was concluded in April 1982 under the Egyptian- Israeli peace treaty. This was one of the steps that was taken—

Q: What's happening now?

MAESTRONE: When the Israelis withdrew completely from the Sinai, at that point the American operation closed down. It was turned over to the multinational force and observers, I think it's called, MFO, which again was something that was insisted upon by the Israelis, and in which there was to be American military participation, as well as participation from a number of other countries, I think, nine or ten other countries.

Q: Under the aegis of the U.N.?

MAESTRONE: No, this did not come under the aegis of the U.N., because the Israelis would not agree that the U.N. would be involved. They were, and continue to be, very suspicious of the U.N. So it was a separate operation, an international operation set up, in effect, by the United States, Israel, and Egypt.

Q: While you were director of the Sinai support mission, were there any specific problems or crises?

MAESTRONE: There were a number that came up about various Egyptian deployments, etc., at least, that the Israelis reported their intelligence had picked up. But our practice was to, naturally, inspect these challenges from either side immediately, then to hold a meeting between the Egyptians and the Israelis themselves, at which we were merely observers. We would present the facts of our inspection, and then allow them to discuss and settle the problem. This helped to build a good working relationship between the Egyptian and Israeli military, which served to be part of the development of their relationship under the peace treaty.

Q: Let's move back a little bit to 1971 when you were consular of embassy for political affairs in Manila. Was Ferdinand Marcos in charge at that time in Manila?

MAESTRONE: Oh, absolutely, he was president and, in actual fact, at that time his presidency, particularly his first term—he had been elected for a second term—was considered to have been a rather good era in Philippine relations and development, since Marcos had had a pretty good administration. Obviously there was corruption, but corruption is pretty much endemic throughout that area, not to mention other areas as well, including, maybe, the United States. But his terms in office were considered to be rather exemplary.

However, the political situation in the Philippines had begun to deteriorate considerably because of the antics of the various political powers throughout the Philippines. Each one

in his particular area had his stronghold. Although they were supporters of Marcos, he was not really able to control them as much as he would have liked. They did support his policies when they were in the Senate or in the House of Representatives. But when they were operating in their own areas, they carried on somewhat independently. Their actions, particularly during various elections, were especially reprehensible. When candidates looked like they might have a chance of upsetting some of their favorite people, they were eliminated by ambushes, shooting, what have you, and this solved the political problem for them.

Also there was a great deal of shooting going on in the cities; everybody carried guns. So it was really getting quite dangerous if you were caught in a cross-fire. There were a number of incidents that happened in Manila while I was there. In view of this deteriorating situation it was expected that Marcos would declare martial law to reestablish control in the Philippines. In fact, I had lunch—I think it was on a Wednesday—with Benigno Aquino, in which we discussed this situation, during which he said that if the president declares martial law, he would support him. However, he was one of his major opposition leaders. What actually happened was that martial law was declared at midnight on Friday. The first man that was arrested under martial law was Benigno Aquino, so he never got a chance to support Ferdinand Marcos in this respect.

Q: Are you suggesting that the martial law was used to squelch the opposition, rather than to clean up the abuses?

MAESTRONE: No, I am not suggesting that, although it was also used for that reason. But the primary reason for martial law was to try to bring order back into the country. The military took control of various areas. In fact, an order was issued that all Filipinos had to turn in their weapons, not just assault weapons, but all kinds of weapons. Indeed, they turned in hundreds of thousands of weapons, because they were required to do so. At least, it was estimated that, maybe, half the weapons were turned in. There was still half outstanding, but these went from pistols all the way up to, I think, a governor in

some remote province had a small tank that he had someone build for his forces down in that area. The situation improved, absolutely immediately. I mean, no longer did you see people carrying guns around or anything like that. The shooting stopped. Indeed, Marcos' action was certainly approved by the majority of the people. There was no doubt about it. Even some of the politicians I knew who were in opposition to Marcos approved of his action.

What happened later, of course, was a different story. Initially, it started all right. The Filipinos did not expect it to continue. They thought it was a temporary measure.

Q: Now are you saying that martial law was continued even after some kind of stability was restored?

MAESTRONE: Oh, yes, it was years, yes.

Q: Yes, and perverted in that period, too.

MAESTRONE: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you have a chance to meet Marcos and Imelda in that period?

MAESTRONE: Oh, yes.

Q: What was your impression of these people?

MAESTRONE: Marcos was one of the most articulate men I've ever met, particularly, in English. I recall, as a matter of fact, when martial law was instituted—as I say, it was at midnight Friday—Saturday afternoon he gave a speech which was televised, in which he spoke for three hours detailing all the reasons why this had taken place and what he planned to do, etc., without notes, and never repeated himself once in completely fluent English, with a few peculiar pronunciations, which are peculiar to the Filipinos, anyway. He was a rather impressive fellow, quite intelligent, sharp. Imelda I never, really got to know

very well. I met her on numerous occasions, but she was a very cold person, in personality terms, and one of the things that put me off immediately was that sort of limp handshake, something like grabbing onto a cold fish. I just never cared for her very much.

Q: What was the official American position toward Marcos in that period?

MAESTRONE: We had a very close relationship with Marcos, although we did not approve of martial law, in fact. Although I personally considered that had it been continued only for a short period until order was gotten back to the Philippines, it was probably a good thing. But we never approved of the continuation of martial law. We had an Ambassador Hank Byroade, who had an especially good relationship with Marcos, which he developed over the years prior to martial law. Marcos would consult with Byroade on a variety of matters, although he did not consult him on the martial law, for instance.

Q: There was an insurrection in the Philippines at that time. Was this strictly a religious or Muslim insurrection, or was there a communist element involved there?

MAESTRONE: There were two insurrections going on. One was the continuation of the original Huk insurrection, which became the New People's Army and was led by the—continued to be led by the communists, which continues today—which, indeed, under the extended period of Marcos' rule gained strength throughout the country.

The other occurred at the time I was there and was a Muslim insurrection, which was designed to obtain more autonomy for the governing of certain of the southern areas, particularly, in the Sulu Islands and the province of Cotabato. Where the Muslims were, in the case of the Sulus a majority, and in Cotabato, I think, they probably had at least fifty percent of the population. This started up. It was a very difficult matter for the Philippine army to deal with because a lot of it took place in these tropical forests and what have you, where there was plenty of opportunity for concealment. Also, the Sulu Islands stretched out toward the island of Borneo, where there was the state of Sabah, where many of the

Sulu islanders had relatives and they received support and military supplies and so on from them. So it was a difficult thing for the Philippine armed forces to deal with.

Q: Well, when you were there, did the United States supply arms to the Philippine military in order to put down these rebellions?

MAESTRONE: No, we didn't supply arms for them to put down the rebellions. Well, perhaps we did with respect to the communists, the New People's Army rebellion, but not with respect to the Muslim rebellion. But then how could you distinguish between them? We had a regular military assistance program going. We had a large one in connection with all of our arrangements with respect to the major bases we have there, Clark Air Force Base and Subic Naval Base.

Q: Was there agitation, at that time, for Americans to get out of the bases in the Philippines?

MAESTRONE: Only from a very small radical fringe. Otherwise, the Americans had a great deal of support. In fact, during my time there, there was a movement by one politician to have the Philippines become the 51st American state. It was surprising the amount of support, indeed, embarrassing to Marcos, the amount of support he was able to generate. He, of course, tried to tamp this down as much as we could.

Q: Well, over your career, you've met and worked with many prominent, and some not so prominent, American diplomats and foreign leaders. Do any of these leaders stand out in your mind as being special personalities, as having made a particular mark on history in their area or in the world?

MAESTRONE: Well, certainly, in terms of the foreigners that I met, yes, many of them made an impressive contribution to one thing or another in terms of politics or economics. Starting back in Austria, I'm trying quickly to remember the name of the foreign minister

who was very active and very capable under the government of the Chancellor Figl. The foreign minister's name is well known, but it escapes me for the moment.

Then in Germany I met a number of people, some I didn't meet but I saw speak and attended various ceremonies where they were present, took an active part like Adenauer and others. In Germany, also, John McCloy was high commissioner when I was there. I remember attending some of his staff meetings in Bonn in my capacity as deputy land observer for Hamburg, very impressive personality.

Then, certainly, in NATO there were all kinds of top people there, Couve de Murville Paul Henri Spaak, just to name a few, Edward Heese, Selwyn Lloyd and numbers of others, Walter Shale, who was subsequently President of the Federal Republic, Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, and one of the people whose role was very understated but who made a tremendous contribution, I thought, to NATO during the time I was there, Manlio Brosio, the Secretary General of NATO, who had also been ambassador to the United States from Italy when I was the Italian desk officer some years before.

Certainly, in the Middle East, Anwar Sadat was one of the outstanding statesmen that the world has seen. I had the occasion to meet him numerous times and to take important Americans, senators, congressmen, etc., to meet with him when I was charg# d'affaires.

Q: Could we focus on Sadat, because the conventional wisdom has it that he could be elected to any position in the world except in—he couldn't be elected to anything in Cairo; that his popularity was more international than it was domestic. Did you find that to be true?

MAESTRONE: I think that can only be characterized as accurate in terms of a charismatic attraction. He did not have the charismatic attraction from the Egyptian people that Nasser did, for example. On the other hand, his efforts to achieve peace were fully supported by the Egyptian people. And I don't mean the politicians, etc. The people on the street, I remember, meeting with them at the various bazaars elsewhere, and, you know, they

were all in favor of peace. They even thought Henry Kissinger was a great man because he was working for peace in that direction. So that I think that that's a bit overdrawn. He was not a charismatically popular political figure, but he was highly respected by the Egyptian people. Certainly, his dedication to peace, which I had personally observed in a number of occasions, was as great as you would find in any great statesman. And very impressive, indeed, I—there were occasions in the negotiations for the second Sinai disengagement where he overruled his entire cabinet to make concessions which were minor concessions in his view, because they would enable larger steps to be made in the direction of peace. His various advisors would insist on, you know, limiting the number of kilometers of an area that they would agree the Israelis could still hold and that kind of thing. Sadat dismissed all of this as minor details which were not important in achieving the objective he sought, and he was right.

Q: Yet, on his assassination, it appeared that the Egyptian populace was not as—well, they may have been shocked—but not as distraught as we might have thought, considering the position he held under our eyes.

MAESTRONE: Well, no, he did not attract the kind of fanaticism, for example, that you see in Tehran today when Khomeini died. He didn't attract that kind of thing, but he did have high respect. And, besides, the whole question of his funeral, etc. was handled so very rapidly and very quickly without the populace being given an opportunity to participate. It's true there was no, sort of, natural outburst on the part of the people with respect to Sadat. And, of course, his assassination was accomplished by radical Muslim fundamentalists who were in the Army and who had managed to work their way into this particular parade.

Q: Sadat would be one of the major personalities with whom you have worked and had some relationship in your career?

MAESTRONE: Certainly, I'd say he would be, certainly, one of the major personalities. And the others would be Marcos, although had less direct contact in that sense, since

it was pretty much reserved to the ambassador. But, whereas, in Cairo I was charg# d'affaires for long periods of time and frequent periods of time so that I did have more contact with Sadat. Others I met, interestingly enough, there were quite a number of people in Kuwait who would come there on visits, including President Tito, with whom I had a long conversation at one diplomatic dinner there. I met a lot of these people, General Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan; another one, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan, not too long before he was assassinated. A whole variety of people I met during my career.

Q: Would you say—and we might end on this one, and it may be a rather difficult question to address. I'm finding it difficult to frame. When we confront problems at an embassy, these problems are major in terms of our perspective from which we address them. That is, from the embassy point of view, if it's a problem, usually it's an important problem. But now that you're retired and looking back over a career, how much impact would you say our efforts in various embassies and missions—how much impact on the course of events did the U.S. have through its embassy operations? Am I making it too complicated?

MAESTRONE: I understand what you are trying to get at, and it is a very difficult question to answer because it is difficult to assess how much of the credit should be given to the work of the embassy in putting forward a U.S. policy. It's really quite difficult. I think the embassies play a considerable role. I wouldn't care to determine it on a scale of one to ten. It varies from question to question. There are some cases when the ambassador can, even without consulting the Department of State, accomplish certain things which are in the interest of the country.

For example, I had one case when I was talking to the—or actually discussing our military sales program with the Defense Minister of Kuwait, who is presently the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Salim Al Sabah. Sheikh Abdullah was telling me that they were planning to acquire the Soviet anti-aircraft system. I think it's the ZSU 23, it's called. It was the best anti-aircraft system available, and the Kuwaitis had been trying to get some sort of a suitable anti-aircraft system from us or from one of the Western

countries. None of the ones that were available in the West were rated as high as the Soviet one. In fact, the United States had a very poor system. I forget what it was called. We still don't have a very good anti-aircraft system available to our military forces. But we had supplied the Kuwaitis with the Hawk missile, which was an intermediate and high-level aircraft defense system. I told Sheikh Abdullah that there was no way he could acquire this Soviet system, because in order to have a completely adequate air defense, the Soviet system would have to be integrated with the Hawk system to give them complete coverage, since the Soviet system was a low-level anti-aircraft system. I reminded him that we had a classified agreement with respect to the classified aspects of the Hawk system. I said that in order to install the Soviet system, the Soviets would have to be informed of how our Hawk system works in every detail in order to integrate their system. I said, “We just can't do that.” And that was the end of it, right there. I reported this to the Department, incidentally, never got comment from them one way or another. But he dropped the whole matter.

Obviously, my experience in military affairs, having been with NATO, etc., all of that enabled me to deal with that kind of a matter directly, which is why I think it is so important to have ambassadors who have professional experience in the Foreign Service. While there may be exceptions, on the whole, I think that the political appointees to ambassadorships just cannot measure up to the kind of quality that a Foreign Service officer who is appointed to ambassador can give to this country.

Q: Well, unless you have any more editorial opinions, I think we can call it quits at this point. [Laughter]

MAESTRONE: I have several more, but I will refrain.

Q: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

End of interview